

Once Again Concerning the Baptism of Olga, Archontissa of Rus'

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The Kievan princess Olga played a role of no small importance in the entry of Rus' into Christendom. To be sure, as the treaty of 944 between Byzantium and Rus' indicates, there was already a Christian community in Kiev during the reign of her husband Igor, and Christianity had already penetrated the upper strata of Rus' society. Nonetheless, Olga's conversion to Christianity ultimately paved the way for the Christianization of all Rus' in 988.

In recent years a number of papers have been written concerning the time, place, and circumstances of Olga's baptism.¹ Of these, G. G. Litavrin's proposed redating (from 957 to 946) of the visit to Constantinople of the archontissa and hegemon of Rus', Olga, described by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, has been particularly instrumental in encouraging a reexamination of the existing (and often contradictory) interpretations of these questions.² However, Litavrin's argument that 946 is the only possible date, for all its ingenuity, does not sufficiently consider the testimony of the other sources, and hence has met with well-founded objections.³

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¹See, e.g., and for a consideration of earlier opinions, the important series of studies by D. Obolensky: "Russia and Byzantium in the Mid-Tenth Century: The Problem of the Baptism of Princess Olga," *GOTR* 28 (1983), 157–71; "The Baptism of Princess Olga of Kiev: The Problem of the Sources," *Byzantina Sorbonensia* (1984), 159–76; "Olga's Conversion: The Evidence Reconsidered," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12–13 (1988–89 [1990]), 145–58. Obolensky argues that Olga was baptized during a visit to Constantinople in 960.

²See G. G. Litavrin, "O datirovke posol'stva knjagini Ol'gi v Konstantinopol'," *Istorija SSSR* (1981), no. 5, 173–83; idem, "Russkovizantijskij svjazi v seredine X veka," *VoprIst* (1986), no. 6, 41–52.

³A. Poppe, "Christianisierung und Kirchenorganisation der Ostslawen in der Zeit vom 10. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert," *Österreichische Osthefte* 30 (1988), 460–65; A. V. Nazarenko, "Kogda že knjaginja Ol'ga ezдила v Konstantinopol'?", *VizVrem* 50 (1989), 66–83 (arguing for 957), and Litavrin's reply, *ibid.*, 83–84.

The present paper proposes a solution to the question of the conversion of Olga on the basis of all the known sources. It differs from earlier studies only in part of its interpretation of those sources. The arguments presented support the long-accepted date of Olga's conversion, closer to 955, and further develop an idea first advanced by G. Ostrogorsky, demonstrating that the baptism of Olga was associated with her elevation to the imperial rank of *zōstē patrikia*.⁴

After the death of the Kievan prince Igor (ca. 945), the regency of the widowed princess Olga (until ca. 960) supported the further Christianization of Rus'. The clearest expression of this policy was the baptism of Olga herself, although the precise time and place of that event has remained uncertain.⁵ According to eleventh-century tradition, voiced by the *Primary Chronicle*, the baptism took place in Constantinople, with the participation of the patriarch and emperor.⁶ The fact that Olga's baptismal name, Helen, was also the name of the wife of Constantine Porphyrogenitus suggests the involvement of the imperial couple as godparents.

⁴G. Ostrogorsky, "Vizantija i kievskaja knjaginja Ol'ga," in *To Honor Roman Jakobson* (The Hague-Paris, 1967), 1458–73. Ostrogorsky presumed that Olga visited Constantinople only once, in 957, when she was already a Christian, and he therefore follows the *Primary Chronicle* in dating her baptism to ca. 955, though he locates it in Kiev. A similar dating for the baptism—despite his proposal for an earlier visit by Olga to Constantinople in 946—is accepted by G. G. Litavrin, "K voprosu ob obstojatel'stvah, meste i vremeni kreščenija knjagini Ol'gi," in *Drevnijiše gosudarstva na territorii SSSR. 1985* (Moscow, 1986), 55–57.

⁵On the historiography of the question see Obolensky, "Russia and Byzantium," 157 ff; Nazarenko, "Kogda že knjaginja Ol'ga"; M. Labunka, "Religious Centers and Their Missions to Kievan Rus': From Ol'ga to Volodimer," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12–13 (1988–89 [1990]), 165–70; also O. Pritsak, "When and Where was Ol'ga Baptised?" *ibid.*, 9 (1985), 5–21.

⁶*PSRL*, I, cols. 60–62. For a commentary on the *Primary Chronicle's* tale of Olga's conversion, see L. Müller, "Die Erzählung der 'Nestorchronik' über die Taufe Olgas im Jahre 954/55," *ZSl* 33 (1988), 785–96.

At the same time, however, the account in the chronicle has been embellished with folkloristic elements that attest to later traditions developed within an already Christian society.

The date assigned to the baptism in the *Primary Chronicle*, 6463 (September year 954/55), appears to find some confirmation in the eulogy to Olga included in the triptych *Memory and Eulogy of the Rus'ian Prince Vladimir*. That work, compiled at the end of the thirteenth century, contains annalistic entries dating from the eleventh century, some of which are clearly independent of the chronology of events outlined in the *Primary Chronicle*. The *Memory's* indirect reference to the date of the baptism of Olga ("after holy baptism Olga lived 15 years . . . she died July 11 6477 [969]"⁷) may perhaps be considered an independent source, although this still does not constitute a decisive argument. It is rather the completely independent report found in the *Synopsis historiarum* of John Skylitzes that demonstrates that the chronicle's date of A.M. 6463 (= 954/55) is highly probable. Writing in the second half of the eleventh century, the chronicler made use of tenth-century sources. He notes that Olga came to Constantinople after the death of her husband and returned home a baptized Christian. All of the events before and after this entry relate to the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and, more specifically, to the period between the dethronement of Romanos I Lekapenos in December 944 and the death of Patriarch Theophylaktos on 27 February 956. Skylitzes precedes his reference to the baptism of Olga with information about relations with the Hungarians in the years 948–955, and follows it with a report of the marriage of Constantine's son Romanos II to Theophano, an event that could not have taken place later than 956, and most likely occurred in 955.⁸ Thus, the sequence of events per-

mits us to conclude that Olga was baptized in Constantinople about 955. In light of the compilatory character of Skylitzes' work, we cannot of course rule out the possibility of a mistaken sequence, but its concurrence with the two reports from Rus' makes a 955 date for Olga's baptism most likely.

The description of the visit of the archontissa and hegemon of Rus' Olga as found in *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* does not state directly whether the princess was already a Christian at the time; the current argument over whether this autumn visit took place in 946 or 957 thus has no essential implications for the place and time of her baptism. It is possible, however, to draw certain indirect conclusions. The fact that Olga appears here under her princely pagan name (Elga) rather than her Christian one (Helena), proves nothing in and of itself—oft-repeated opinion to the contrary notwithstanding—for many Christian rulers of Rus', beginning with Vladimir, were known to Byzantine authors only by their princely names.⁹ The presence of a priest in Olga's suite is likewise of no decisive significance: he could have been present to assist an already baptized princess (or catechumen), but he could also have been there simply because some of the individuals accompanying Olga were Christian (just as some of the emissaries concluding the treaty of 944 had been).

More significant, however, is the remark of *De cerimoniis* to the effect that, during the ceremonial banquet, Olga sat among the *zōstai*, in accordance with her rank, at the "separate" table. In other words, Olga was equated with a *zōstē* (literally, "girdled") *patrikia*, the highest female rank of the

⁷"Pamjat' i pohvala Jakova Mniha i žitie knjazja Vladimira po drevnejšemu spisku," ed. A. Zimin, in *KrSoobInstSlav* 37 (1963), 70. On Jakov's work see A. Poppe in *Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich* 4 (1970), 16–18; also E. Fet in *Slovar' knižnikov i knižnosti Drevnej Rusi: XI–polovina XIV v.* (Moscow, 1987), 288–90.

⁸*Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn (Berlin-New York, 1973), 237–40. The accepted view is that the reported baptism of the Hungarian prince Bulcsu took place in 948, and that of Gyula in 952/53: see, e.g., G. Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars* (Budapest, 1970), 104–6; G. Györffy, "Role de Byzance dans la conversion des Hongrois," in *Cultus et cognitio* (Warsaw, 1976), 174. If this was so, then in Skylitzes' sequence the baptism of Olga should be dated between 952 and 956. Skylitzes' sequence is called into question by G. G. Litavrin, "Putešestvie russkoj knjagini Ol'gi v Konstantinopol': Problema istočnikov," *VizVrem* 42 (1981), 40, who notes the reference to the death of Bertha-Eudokia, which occurred in 949. However,

Skylitzes here does not break the sequence, but merely alludes to his own previous reference to Bertha's death (*Synopsis*, 231), just as in his account of Olga's baptism he alludes to the 941 campaign of Olga's deceased husband Igor.

⁹For the view that Constantine's use of Olga's pagan name indicates that she was not yet converted, see e.g., J.-P. Arrignon, "Les relations internationales de la Russie kievienne au milieu du Xe siècle et le baptême de la Princesse Olga," in *Occident et Orient au Xe siècle* (Paris, 1975), 168, 171, 174; Obolensky, "Ol'ga's Conversion," 151; Litavrin, "K voprosu," 52–54. However, in the *De administrando imperio* Constantine on five occasions speaks of "Boris," ruler of the Bulgars, and only three times does he mention Boris' baptismal name of Michael. He refers to the princes of the baptized Croats only as Terpimir, Krasimir, and Miroslav, and to the prince of Moravia only as Swentopolk (five times). Skylitzes ignores Christian names in his notices on the baptism of the Magyar princes and of Olga. It appears that in public and diplomatic contexts the use of dynastic ("pagan") names was the norm, and the use of baptismal names was reserved for more private occasions. Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, Bonn ed., I (1839), 687; II (1841), 214, who appears to assume that even the patriarch was unaware of the baptismal name of Leo III.

imperial court. The title of *zōstē* was used at that time by only two ladies-in-waiting of the wives of Emperor Constantine and his son, Emperor Romanos. However, one also finds in tenth-century sources that *zōstē* appears as an honorary title bestowed upon the females of neighboring dynasties, including the Bulgarians.¹⁰ And only the *zōstē* had the right to sit at the table of the imperial family. Thus, the “fitting honor” that Skylitzes reports was shown to Olga after her baptism, if it is understood as the award of the title of *zōstē*, was not an exceptional event, particularly in light of the fact that the Hungarian princes were granted the title of *patrikios* after their baptism. The Byzantine custom of granting court titles to foreign rulers baptized with the participation of the emperor was continued in the tenth century, and an omission of this gesture in the case of Olga would be difficult to explain. It is also worth noting that there are no known instances of a non-Christian being granted the title of *zōstē*.

On the basis, then, of *De cerimoniis* and Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, it can be concluded that Olga received the title of *zōstē patrikia* after her baptism, an act also associated with the imperial pair's role as godparents of the archontissa of Rus'.¹¹ Likewise, the seating of the princess in the midst of the imperial family, enabling her at dessert to converse freely

with the emperor, represented an exceptional degree of intimacy for the Byzantine court, with its cultivation of stiff ceremonial. Such honor to a pagan ruler would have been unheard of, but it would have been natural and appropriate for a *zōstē* and imperial goddaughter. Given the fact of Olga's spiritual kinship with the imperial family, we must date her visit as a Christian to the autumn of 957, and her baptism to an earlier trip to Constantinople, which could have taken place in 954 or 955.

Such a date would appear to be contradicted by the *Continuation of the Chronicle of Regino of Prüm*, probably written by Adalbert, a monk from Trier and later missionary bishop to Rus', who in 968 became the first archbishop of Magdeburg. In this work, under the year 959, we read that “ambassadors of Helena, queen of the Rus', who was baptized in Constantinople under Romanos, emperor of Constantinople, came to the king [Otto I], asking—insincerely, as it later turned out—for the appointment of a bishop and priests for that people.”¹² A literal interpretation of this report would force us to move the date of Olga's baptism to the reign of Romanos II, between 9 November 959 and 15 March 963, but such a conclusion would merely serve to make this report even more confusing, for it would mean that in 959 it was the pagan Olga, not the Christian Helena, who sent the embassy to Otto I.¹³ A more convincing argument would be that in light of the late date of the writing of this note (after 962 but no later than 967) we are dealing here with a typical lapse of memory, resulting in the mistaken substitution of Romanos' name for Constantine's.¹⁴ Other in-

¹⁰Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, I, CFHB (Bonn, 1829), 594–98 (bk. 2, 15). For the view that Olga at the reception had status equivalent to a *zōstē patrikia*, see Ostrogorsky, “Vizantija,” 1458–73; cf. Obolensky, “Ol'ga's Conversion,” 163; Arrignon, “Les relations,” 173. On the title see R. Guillard, “Contribution à l'histoire administrative de l'Empire byzantin: La patricienne à ceinture,” *BSI* 32 (1971), 269–75; also J. Deér, “Zur Praxis der Verleihung des auswärtigen Patriziats durch den byzantinischen Kaiser,” in idem, *Byzanz und das abendländische Herrschertum*, Vorträge und Forschungen 21 (Sigmaringen, 1977), 424–37.

¹¹Cf. Ostrogorsky, “Vizantija,” 1469–71. Skylitzes mentions that both the Magyar princes were made patricians, so one can assume that his phrase ἄξιως τιμηθεῖσα implies an equivalent promotion for Olga: *Synopsis*, 239–41; cf. the similar terminology in Theophanes Continuatus, CFHB (Bonn, 1838), 469, 471. However, Olga could not be made a simple *patrikia*, since that title was granted only to the wives of patricians. Constantine's account of her reception provides strong support for the view that she was given the highest court dignity available to a woman, the title of *zōstē patrikia*. After baptism Olga would have been a spiritual daughter of the ruling couple, a member of the imperial family, so it could be appropriate—according to ceremonial rules—that at table she should take her place at the imperial table between the two *zōstai* (μετὰ τῶν ζώστων κατὰ τὸν τύπον: *De cer.*, 597, 1.4). Note also that her ceremonial garments as *zōstē*—especially the *loros* and the *propolema*—would have restricted her movements and prevented her from performing complete proskynesis. Olga limited herself to a slight inclination of the head: see Guillard, “Contribution,” 271; on proskynesis see idem, *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines*, I (Berlin-Amsterdam, 1967), 144–48, esp. 145, 147.

¹²Adalberti *Continuatio Reginonis*, in *Quellen zur Geschichte der sächsischen Kaiserzeit*, ed. A. Bauer and R. Rau (Darmstadt, 1977), 214–15.

¹³Obolensky, “The Baptism,” 163–73, and Arrignon, “Les relations,” 177–78, accept as authentic the statement in Adalbert that Olga was baptized under Romanos, but fail to note this would put in question the other Kievan information in Adalbert: see Litavrin, “Putešestvie,” 38–39. Libutius, a monk of the monastery of St. Alban, was consecrated bishop for the Rus' in Frankfurt in the presence of Otto I at Christmas 959. Otto must therefore have been informed of Olga's request by envoys at least two or three months earlier, i.e., before Romanos II came to the throne on 9 November 959. We must assume that the Kievan envoys set out not later than August or September 959.

¹⁴Adalbert heard about Olga's baptism from Olga herself, who may well have mentioned that the current emperor (Romanos) had attended, and thus there may have arisen the false information in the text. Adalbert was certainly well informed, but that does not mean that we are always well informed by him. Cf. Thietmar (bk. VII, 72) who manages to confuse Otto III with Otto II, and to refer to Anna Porphyrogenita as “Helen.” See also below, note 15.

stances of imprecision and incorrect detail in the *Continuation* would tend to confirm this hypothesis.¹⁵

The visit of an embassy from Rus' in 959 is not itself in question, for already at Christmas of that year, at Frankfurt, in the presence of Otto I, the monk Libutius was consecrated as bishop "genti Rusorum." In light of this fact, the arrival of the embassy from Rus' should be dated to the fall of 959, while Constantine Porphyrogenitus was still alive. In any case, news of his death on 9 November and of the assumption of power by Emperor Romanos could hardly have reached the royal court by Christmas.

The reliability of the report would not be questioned if, instead of "sub Romano imperatore Constantinopolitano" one reads "sub Constantino et Romano imperatoribus Constantinopolitanis." The surviving manuscript tradition, it is true, does not exclude the possibility of such an earlier form, but neither does it provide grounds for such an emendation of the text. There are, however, other circumstances enabling us to explain such imprecision at the time of the writing of the *Continuation* entry. Romanos II became emperor and autocrat only after the death of his father Constantine Porphyrogenitus on 9 November 959, but he was nominally emperor from the moment of his coronation, at his father's wish, on 6 April 946. At the courts of Europe it was well known who the real ruler was, but that did not free one from the obligation of observing the established rules. "Regnal years" were numbered from the date of coronation (and hence, for Romanos, from 946), and in correspondence produced by the Byzantine chancellery, the titulature included the names of both emperors, Constantine and Romanos.¹⁶ Moreover, the co-emperor was named along with the real emperor in the address of letters sent to the Byzantine court.¹⁷

¹⁵ Adalbert did indeed produce the "outstanding work of tenth-century German historiography," but one should not thereby assume that he is always an "accurate and valuable reporter" (see Obolensky, "Ol'ga's Conversion," 152, 154). On his errors and contradictions see M. Lintzel, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, II (Berlin, 1961), 399–406; also K. Hauck, "Erzbischof Adalbert von Magdeburg als Geschichtsschreiber," in *Festschrift für W. Schlesinger*, II (Cologne-Vienna, 1974), 276–353.

¹⁶ See the intitulation formulae in *De cer.*, II, 28 (vol. I, 686–92). On this topic see F. Dölger, "Das byzantinische Mitkaisertum in der Urkunden," in *Das byzantinische Herrscherbild*, Wege der Forschungen, 341 (Darmstadt, 1975), 13–48; cf. Nazarenko, "Kogda že knjaginja Ol'ga," 76.

¹⁷ These are not preserved, but cf. Hugo Capet, writing at the turn of 987 "to the Orthodox Emperors Basil and Constantine": *Die Briefsammlung Gerberts von Reims*, ed. F. Weigle, MGH,

The author of the *Continuation*, Adalbert, worked from 953 to 956 and, after his return from Kiev, 962 to 966 in the chancellery of Otto I, and thus was well acquainted with the formulary of Byzantine correspondence. From 946 Romanos had been named alongside Constantine in the addresses of letters sent to Constantinople from the Ottonian chancellery. When Adalbert returned to his duties in the chancellery after his visit to Kiev, Romanos, as emperor and autocrat, figured first in the address. Hence, it can be argued, Adalbert named him alone when he wrote the further installment of his chronicle in 966–967.¹⁸

We thus have the right to consider Adalbert's information reliable, if inexact by virtue of incompleteness, for in accordance with the "chancellery" view of the surrounding world, Olga-Helena had been baptized during the reign of emperors Constantine and Romanos.

This information about the princess of Rus' has come down to us from Adalbert solely because of the latter's need to comment on the Rus' episode of his biography and to justify his lack of success there. As fate had it, the departure of Bishop Libutius was delayed (his death on 15 February 961 suggesting that illness was the reason). The subsequent consecration of Adalbert to Rus' must have taken place fairly quickly, but not earlier than Easter, 7 April 961; in the summer Adalbert could have arrived in Kiev in order to return after spending less than a year there.

Emphasizing the difficulties and dangers of his journey, Adalbert grumbled against the agent of his advancement, Wilhelm Archbishop of Mainz, "from whom he had expected better treatment, since he had never done him any wrong."¹⁹ From this comment it is already apparent that Adalbert belonged to that category of ecclesiastical dignitary

Briefe, II (Berlin, 1966), 139; trans. in H. P. Lattin, *The Letters of Gerbert* (New York, 1961), 151. Cf. also W. Ohnsorge, "Das Mitkaisertum in der abendländischen Geschichte des früheren Mittelalters," in idem, *Abendland und Byzanz* (Weimar, 1958), 261–87.

¹⁸ Cf. S. Heider, "Zum Verhältnis von Kapellanat und Geschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter," in *Geschichtsschreibung und geistiges Leben im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Heinz Löwe zum 65. Geburtstag* (Cologne-Vienna, 1978), 107–8, 132. Adalbert's experience in the royal chancellery influenced his writing of the *Continuation*, but was no guarantee against inaccuracy or partiality. On the incongruity of the chronology if we accept that "sub Romano imperatore" must mean "during the sole reign of Romanos" (i.e., after 9 Nov. 959), see above, notes 13–15; also the comments by Müller, "Die Erzählung der Nestorchronik," 786.

¹⁹ *Adalberti Continuatio Reginonis*, 214–19, under the years 961–62.

that had neither desire for nor understanding of the mission "ad maiorem gloriam christianitatis." Adalbert was the polar opposite to a zealous man of the Church like Bruno of Querfurt, who regarded the mission to the pagans, and even a martyr's crown in that cause, as the highest of distinctions.²⁰ The failure of the mission to Rus' thus had its "internal" reasons: the choice of Adalbert as its chief had not been a fortunate one. Even if he undertook his task without enthusiasm, the missionary bishop did not simply dream up all the difficulties he reported encountering on the Dnieper. Two full years had passed since Olga's invitation to the mission. Svjatoslav, who by this time had reached manhood and assumed power, was at the very least indifferent to the efforts of the mission, valuing more highly the opinions of his entourage, warriors who poked fun at Christianity.

Under these new conditions, the pro-Christian Olga was unable to offer effective support to these missionary efforts. The authorities were not quick "compellere intrare" (Luke 14:23), and the disappointed missionaries did not delay in returning to their homeland. The generally held view that the failure of the mission was a result of rivalries between Rome and Constantinople lacks any real foundation. Regardless of certain differences in rite, which could not have mattered to Olga in any case, there was still one Church at that time, and the activity of Greek or Latin missionaries therefore did not have to be mutually exclusive, even though a signal success of one or the other missions would have made the issue of ecclesiastical jurisdiction the order of the day. Olga clearly understood that the conversion of the country would be difficult to carry out without dynastic, political, and ecclesiastical contacts and sufficient aid from the outside; she could have felt justified in turning to any Christian ruler for this purpose.²¹ Her appeal met, moreover, with a moderately favorable but short-lived response from the court of

Otto I. Otto I ultimately viewed the missionary action from the perspective of his own political interests, and those did not extend too far east of the Elbe.²²

Likewise, the practical recommendations on foreign policy toward northern neighbors laid out by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in *De administrando imperio* indicates that in the mid-tenth century the political horizon of the empire was dominated by the Khazars and Pechenegs. To be sure, political and commercial contacts with Rus' were valued, as were mercenaries from Rus', but in this conversion of its ruler the opportunity of opening Rus' to Christianity was not yet sensed. No doubt influenced by earlier failures, Byzantine politics in this period lacked a genuine missionary impulse. In both Rome and Constantinople in the tenth century there was a lack of the imagination that had earlier accompanied their mutual rivalry over Bulgaria. The limitless east European plain was only faintly sketched on the horizon of the Christian world of that time.

Why exactly would the princess of Rus' have appealed in 959 to the western ruler Otto I, given the established links between Kiev and the Eastern Empire?

We do not know for a fact that Olga linked her efforts to obtain personal baptism during her visit to Constantinople in 954/955 with the sending of a mission headed by a bishop to Rus', but it seems

²⁰ See R. Wenskus, *Studien zur historisch-politischen Gedankenwelt Bruns von Querfurt* (Münster-Cologne, 1956), 91 ff, 143–54, 198–201; J. Karwasńska, "Świadek czasów Chrobrego—Brunon z Kwerfurtu," in *Polska w Świecie* (Warsaw, 1972), 91–105; also A. Poppe, "Vladimir as a Christian," in *The Legacy of St. Vladimir*, ed. J. Breck, J. Meyendorff, and E. Silk (Crestwood, N.Y., 1990), 44–46.

²¹ See F. Dölger, "Die 'Familie der Könige' im Mittelalter," and "Die mittelalterliche 'Familie der Fürsten und Völker' und der Bulgarenherrscher," in idem, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt* (Darmstadt, 1976), 34–69, 183–96; A. Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe* (Berlin-New York, 1984), 5–11, 292–93.

²² There are various, mostly strained, interpretations of Otto I's letter of 968 in which he refers to Adalbert, archbishop of Magdeburg, as metropolitan "totius ultra Albam et Salam Sclavorum gentis": MGH, *DD*, I (1884), no. 366. A traditional opinion is that Otto's *Ostpolitik* aimed at building a Christian empire as far as Kiev. For a more sober assessment see E. Hlawitschka, *Vom Frankreich zur Formierung der europäischen Staaten- und Volkergemeinschaft 840–1046* (Darmstadt, 1986), 115, 125; also Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft*, 293–94. Otto could not ignore Olga's request, but neither did he attach great importance to the Kievan mission, to which he appointed first the sickly Libutius and then (after Libutius died) the unwilling Adalbert. Adalbert's own limited interest in this aspect of the life of the Church is reflected in his apparent indifference toward the newly founded Bavarian, Saxon, Slavic, and Danish bishoprics: see Linzel, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, II, 403–4. There is no evidence to support the hypothesis that the Ottonian Church was attempting to draw Kievan Rus' into the Latin sphere of influence: cf. T. Manteuffel, "Les tentatives d'entraînement de la Russie de Kiev dans la sphère d'influence latine," *Acta Poloniae historica* 22 (1970), 36–42; Labunka, "Religious Centers," 169. Note, in particular, that "Sclavorum gentes" meant only the western Slavs: in German sources of the 10th and 11th centuries Kievan Rus' is *Ruzzia*, *Ruszia*, *Ruzi*, *Russi*, after Adam of Bremen, who drew a clear distinction between *Slavonia* and *Ruzzia*; cf. G. Labuda in *Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich* 5 (1975), 225–27; A. V. Nazarenko, "Ob imeni 'Rus' v nemeckih istočnikah," *Voprosy jazykoznanija* (1980), no. 5, 47 ff.

probable.²³ It is also hard to imagine that it would have been possible for the Byzantines to refuse to honor such a wish expressed by the archontissa and hegemon of Rus'. However, the concrete implementation of this wish depended on the actions of the emperor and patriarch. Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, a scholar and *literatus* with an engaging lifestyle, was no statesman, living more in the past than the present; generous in his promises, he was miserly in his deeds. The patriarch in that period, Theophylaktos, was a man found "more often in the stables than in the church."²⁴ When Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos forced the elevation of his sixteen-year-old son to the patriarchal throne, the opposition of the local bishops was so great that the consecration of the young man in 933 was performed by papal legates. This lamentable situation continued until the death of Theophylaktos on February 27, 956; moreover, as a result of a fall from his horse, he was in poor health during the last two years of his life, and was thus at the very least limited in his activities, which would have included the consecration of bishops. Finally, finding a willing and worthy candidate who would not consider this mission a sentence of exile, could well have compounded the difficulties.

If the view that Olga visited Constantinople as a Christian in 957 is well founded, then her presence here could be linked, perhaps, in addition to political and commercial affairs, with renewed efforts to obtain the dispatch of a bishop and mission to Kiev. The office of patriarch was now occupied by the more worthy Polyeuktos, who, standing up in defense of the principles and canons of the Church, quickly fell into conflict with some of the bishops and with the emperor himself. Constantine began to fear him, and hated him to his last breath.²⁵ No doubt both the emperor and the patriarch would have individually favored Olga's request, but when it came to agreeing to and advancing a candidate, intrigues and quarrels between the palace and Hagia Sophia would surely have led to a postponement of the decision. The failure of the expected pastor to appear in Kiev in 958 or in the summer of 959 could well have led Olga, in Skylitzes' words, authentically devoted to the true

faith, to send her embassy to Otto I in early autumn 959. The fact that she appealed to the German ruler in particular attests to the regent's orientation in the prevailing ecclesiastical situation.²⁶ It was not rivalry between Constantinople and Rome over Rus', but local squabbles in both centers of the Christian world that had led to an ignoring of the great mission of the Church. The pontificate of John XII (955–964) marked the nadir of the papacy in a century characterized by the great historian Baronius as the "saeculum obscurum." John XII, much like Theophylaktos, had been elevated to his throne as an immature seventeen-year-old and led a life of scandal and even crime.²⁷ In both Churches there was no lack of striving toward renewal, but the very presence of unworthy individuals at the helm undermined the missionary efforts that had been undertaken. In such a situation, the regeneration of the Church in symbiosis with the state under Otto I could not have escaped the attention of the regent of Rus'.

Various factors contributed to the failure of the mission to Rus', Adalbert's own lack of spirit being the least among them. The attempts undertaken in Kiev to draw closer to the Christian world, strong in the power of a newly discovered faith, but weak in social support, exposed the lack of genuine interest in an evangelization of Rus' in Constantinople, where political skepticism and ecclesiastical inertia were reinforced by popular fears of the Rus', viewing them as a menace of apocalyptic proportions.

The conversion of Olga, whom the chronicler hails as the herald and dawning light of Christianity in Rus', had far-reaching consequences, even though it did not lead to an immediate breakthrough. The number of Christians continued to

²³ When the Hungarian archon Gyula was baptized in Constantinople ca. 952/53 the monk Hierotheos was consecrated bishop for Hungary and started his missionary work there: see Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 239.

²⁴ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 242–44; cf. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), 272.

²⁵ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 244, 247.

²⁶ On the Ottonian Church see Hlawitschka, *Vom Frankreich zur Formierung*, 50–57, 212–215; J. Fleckenstein, "Problematik und Gestalt der ottonisch-salischen Reichskirche," in *Reich und Kirche vor Investiturstreit* (Sigmaringen, 1985), 83–98. For a different view of Otto I's "mission to Rus'" see A. V. Nazarenko, "Popytka kreshchenija Rusi pri knjagine Ol'ga v kontekste mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenij epohi," in *Cerkov', obshchestvo i gosudarstvo*, (Moscow, 1990), 24–40; idem, "Rus' i Germanija pri Svjatoslave Igoreviche," *IstSSSR* (1990), no. 2, 60–70. Nazarenko places the mission firmly in the context of Byzantino-German relations, and proposes that the appointment of Adalbert, the former bishop of Rus', to the newly created see of Magdeburg in 968 indicates a revival of the idea.

²⁷ See F. Gregorovius, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom im Mittelalter*, I.2 (Darmstadt, 1978), 614–26; H. Fichtenau, "Von Ansehen des Papsttums im 10. Jh.," in idem, *Beiträge zur Mediävistik*, III (Stuttgart, 1986), 98–107; H. Zimmermann, *Im Bann des Mittelalters* (Sigmaringen, 1986), 70–80.

grow, at the Kievan court, among the nobles, and among the townspeople. Olga's effort to win her son Svjatoslav over to the new faith was unsuccessful, although the overall impact of his Bulgarian policy would ultimately open Rus' more fully to the influence of Christianity. What remained to Olga was the possibility of influencing her grandchildren. One of these was Vladimir, raised at the court of his grandmother, where his mother Malusha, concubine of Svjatoslav, performed the duties of steward. Malusha, as a member of the closest retinue of Princess Olga, must have been baptized along with her mistress or not long thereafter, and even if Vladimir was raised according to pagan custom at the wish of his father, his grandmother and mother no doubt did much to ensure that he came to know the new faith. As a result, Christianity was not foreign to Vladimir from his earliest years.²⁸ More than two decades were to

pass, however, before it became the official religion in Kiev.²⁹

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²⁹ After the completion of this study I was able to see a typescript of J. Featherstone's forthcoming article, "Olga's Visit to Constantinople," to be published in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*. Featherstone has some sound observations on the difference between the reception ceremonies for Olga and those for Saracens, noting that Olga was entertained in the inner parts of the palace, which would probably not have been accessible to non-Christians (the Triclinium of Justinian, the Kainourgion, the Pentakouboukleion), and that this seems to confirm Olga's status as a goddaughter to the imperial family. Featherstone also takes the view that Olga was made a *zōstē patrikia*, whose ceremonial dress gave her dispensation from full proskynesis (see above). However, Featherstone's argument that Olga arrived and was baptized on 8 September 957 is vitiated by a weak grasp of the questions of chronology and of the scholarly literature thereon. He devotes much effort to showing that Basil (the future Basil II) was two years old and present at table with Olga. In fact the eldest child of Romanos and Theophano, present at table, could have been a girl (see my suggestion in "The Political Background to the Baptism of Rus'," *DOP* 30 [1976], 230 note 114); and, for Basil's age, Featherstone relies entirely on comments in Skylitzes (*Synopsis*, 369), apparently unaware that different chronicles give different information, and that the question has been a focus of discussion since G. Schlumberger, *L'épopée byzantine à la fin du dixième siècle* (Paris, 1896), 328. Featherstone's chronology also looks strained in the light of Constantine's statement that a reception was held on 9 September ἐπὶ τῇ ἐφόδῳ ("upon the arrival," *De cer.*, I, 594) of Olga.

²⁸ See A. Poppe, "Vladimir, prince chrétien," *Studi storici* (forthcoming). Olga appears also to have had some influence on Vladimir's older brother Yaropolk: Yaropolk's relations with the Ottonian court, and his request for a marriage to Richtlint, a daughter of Graf Kuno of Ohningen, suggest that he was close to conversion before he died in 977/78. See Nazarenko, "Rus' i Germanija v 70-ie gody X veka," *Russia mediaevalis* 6.1 (1987), 38–89.